

Highlights from local civic leaders on food and beverage choices in public service venues

Findings from a 2014 survey with Missouri local civic leaders on food/beverage options and policies in public service venues

In spring 2014, Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services initiated an online survey of local civic leaders in Missouri to examine their perceptions and policies regarding healthy food and beverage choices in local public service venues. The purpose of the survey was to collect baseline data on the views, current practices, and potential need for food policies in public service venues.

Local civic leaders were identified from the Missouri Municipal League membership list and recruited via email and e-newsletter announcements. Over 125 local civic leaders from around the state of Missouri completed the 21-item survey. For the full report or more information about the methodology, please contact Pat Simmons, Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services at pat.simmons@health.mo.gov.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

To date, few Missouri counties have a local government policy establishing nutrition guidelines or standards for public service venues.

Only 10 percent (12) of survey participants said their community had such a policy. These areas included: Audrain, Franklin, Hickory, Jackson, Ozark, Putnam, Ray, and St. Louis counties, as well as the City of St. Louis (Figure 1).

- The nutrition guidelines/policies currently in place for public service venues tended:
 - To be voluntary;
 - Apply to administrative and recreation/community facilities;
 - Create guidelines for snack and beverage vending; and
 - Focus on increasing the availability of healthier choices and nutrition information.
- Most participants (62 percent) identified improving nutrition and supporting healthy food/beverage environments was current or emerging issue.

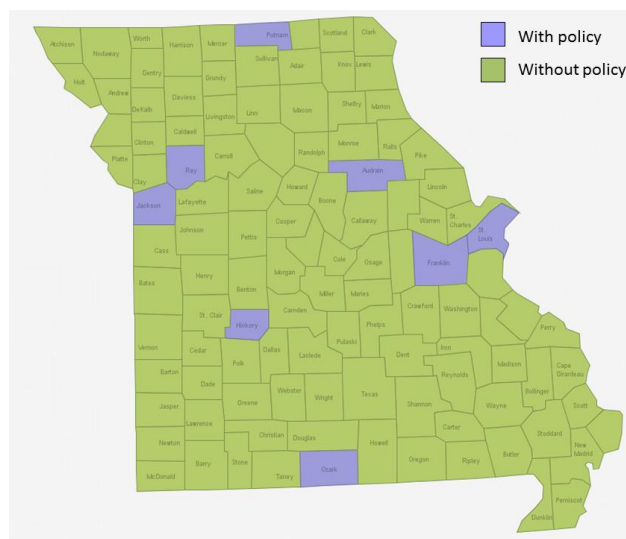


Figure 1. Missouri counties with and without a local healthy food/beverage policy.

Missouri’s local civic leaders recognize connections between programs and policies encouraging healthy eating and health and see public service venues as an important context for providing healthy choices (Figure 2).

- Over 3 out of 4 participants (77%) agree there is a link between people’s work/life environment and obesity.
- Half of participants disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement, “Programs and policies that promote healthy food have little effect on health.” Thirty-four percent did not agree or disagree, which may suggest some uncertainty among local government stakeholders about the effectiveness of nutrition programs and policies in improving health - a factor in their receptivity to and adoption of such efforts.¹

Sample Characteristics

- 64% Female; 36% Male
- Mean age: 54 years old
- 4 out of 5 participants had a role in city/county management or leadership.
- 37% had 10+ years of experience in their profession
- 61 out of 115 MO Counties represented.

- Nearly half (47 percent, or 77) thought it was very or extremely important for public service venues to provide an environment that encourages healthy choices.
- Most participants did not think the local government should be involved in regulating food/beverage choices. Nearly half (48 percent, or 54) of participants thought local government should not be involved, while 23 percent (or 25) believed that it should.

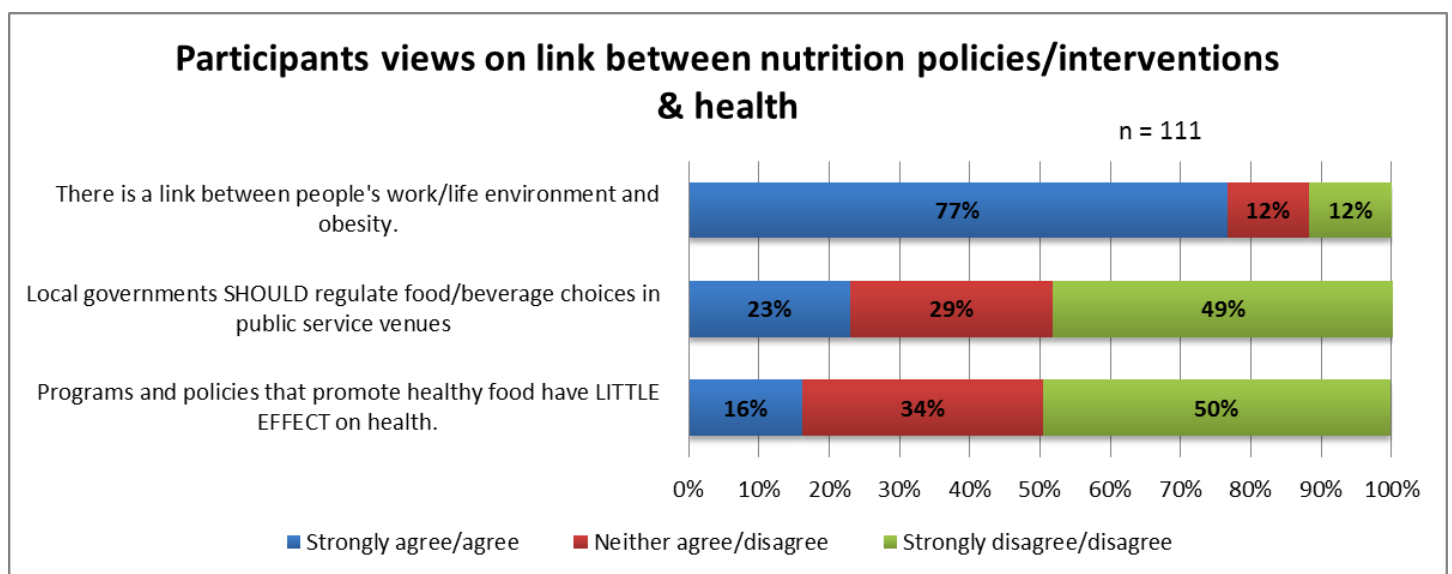


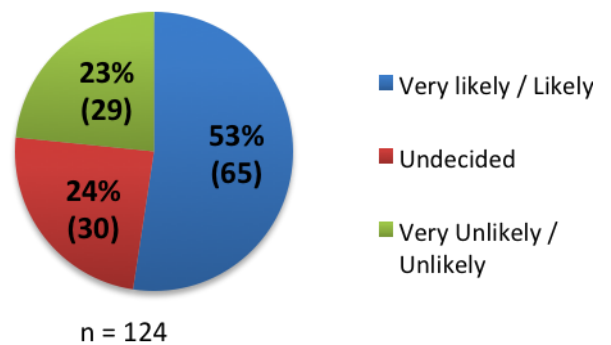
Figure 2. Participants’ beliefs about connection between nutrition policies/interventions and health and role of local government

¹ Lang, T. & Rayner, G. (2007). Overcoming policy cacophony on obesity: an ecological public health framework for policymakers. *Obesity Reviews*, 8(S1), 165-181. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-789X.2007.00338.x

Overall, there was moderate level of individual political will for adopting a local government policy to encourage healthier food/beverage choices, particularly in recreation and community centers.

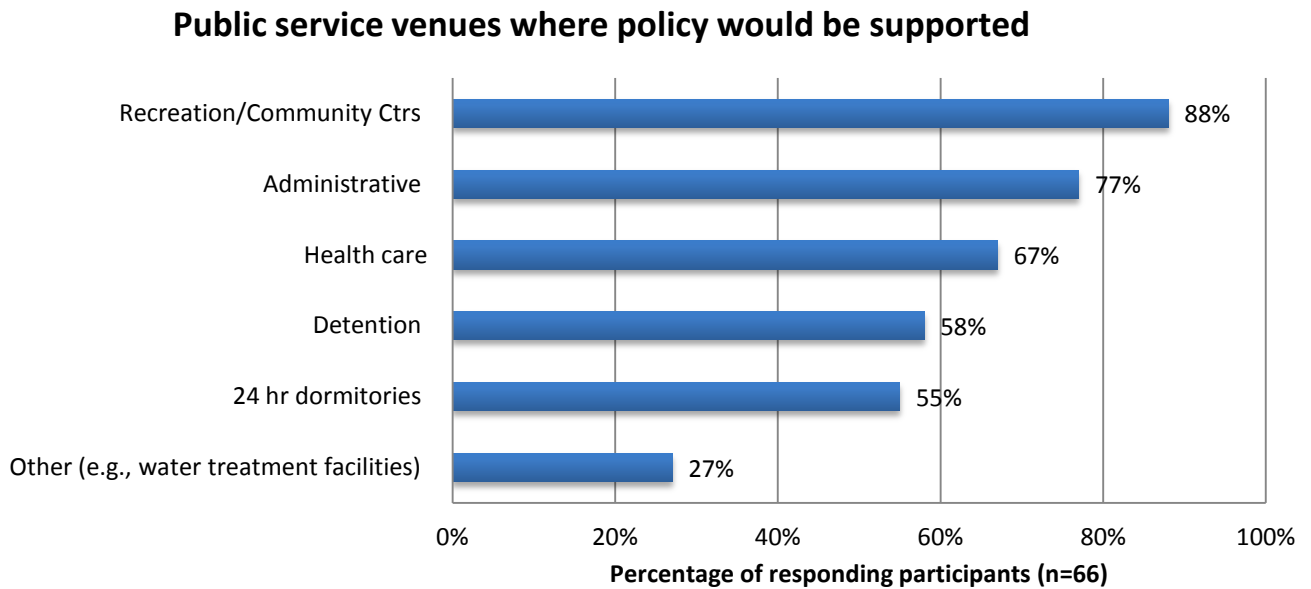
- A little over 50 percent of participants said they were likely or very likely to support a local policy that encourages healthier food/beverage options while 22 percent said they were unlikely or very unlikely to support one (Figure 3).
- Among potential policy supporters, support for a policy was most common for recreation and community centers and less common among other public service venues (i.e., water treatment facilities) and 24-hour dormitory facilities (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Likelihood of support for local food/beverage policy for public service venues.



- Supporters favored a range of provisions or guidelines to include in a policy for public service venues but most tended to favor ones that increased availability of healthy options available (99%) and set standards for the nutritional content of foods and beverages (75%). Participants were least likely to support a provision that raised the prices of unhealthy options.
- However, participants were not entirely opposed to price regulation to nudge consumers to purchase healthier options as 7 out of 10 participants supported lower prices for healthy options.
- The three greatest barriers for adopting a healthy food/beverage policy for public service venues were:
 - Cost of healthy options;
 - Consumer food preferences; and
 - Availability of healthy options.

Figure 4. Types of public services venues where participants would support a local healthy food/beverage policy.

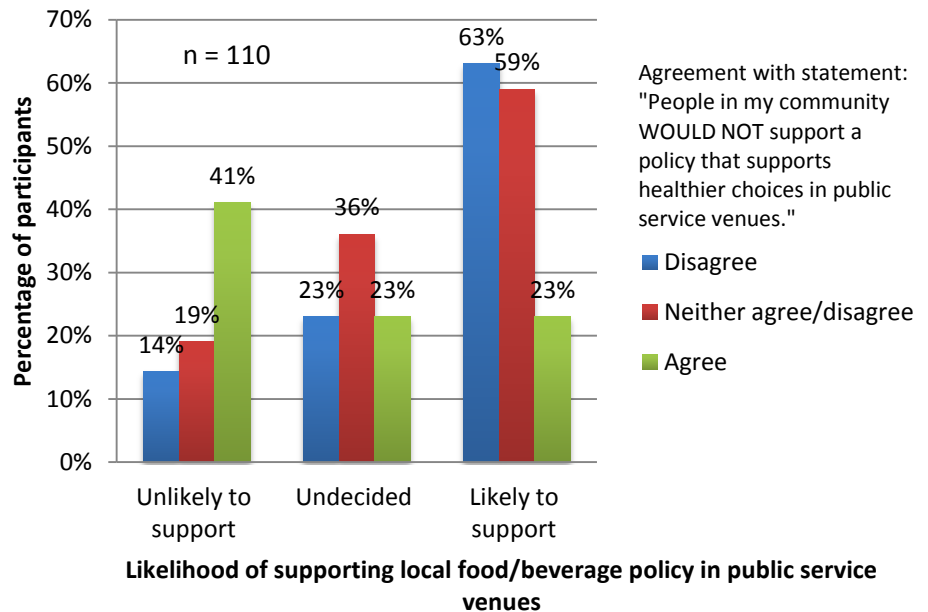


Most of Missouri’s civic leaders were uncertain about whether their community would support a policy that encouraged healthier choices in public services.

- Nearly half of participants (48 percent, or 53) did not agree or disagree with the statement, “People in my community **WOULD NOT** support a policy that supports healthier choices in public service venues.” Slightly more participants disagreed/strongly disagreed with this statement than agreed/strongly agreed (32 percent vs. 20 percent).

- Results suggested a relationship between perceptions of community support and participants’ likelihood of *personally* supporting a local healthy food/beverage policy for public service venues. People who viewed their communities as supportive of a local food/beverage policy in public service venues were 40 percent more likely to also support one themselves (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Perception of political will by likelihood to support local food/beverage policy in public service venues.



Adoption of local healthy food/beverage policy for public service venues could be facilitated by providing more affordable purchasing options, taking into consideration local budgets, and providing leaders with training or technical assistance.

- Affordable food/beverage purchasing options and budget considerations were rated as the most influential factors for adopting a local healthy food/beverage policy in public service venues followed by public perception. The least influential factors among participants were food staff service opinions and local food/beverage policies helping make Missouri a national leader in healthy food/beverage choices.
- To help build community support, participants said training or technical assistance would be most helpful. More than 1 out of 3 participants (38%) were interested in training on ways to encourage healthier options in public service venues.

POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES

1. Program managers and health administrators can use the baseline information provided by the 2014 Missouri Food Choices Survey to develop environmental interventions aimed at improving healthy food choices and reducing adult and child obesity.
2. Education and communications strategies that increase awareness about community support for environmental policies and interventions addressing obesity could help build stronger support for such measures among key stakeholders and policymakers.
3. Ten percent of municipalities surveyed currently have a food policy in place for administration, recreation or community venues. Highlighting the successes and benefits gained by these communities may be another helpful strategy for building support and mobilizing action among other municipal leaders.
4. Adapting Eat Smart in Parks materials to public service venues would help provide key influencers with desired information and resources to address current barriers to adopting local food/beverage policies such as cost, consumer preferences, and availability of healthy choices.
5. Slowly introducing environmental obesity prevention strategies that emphasize individual-oriented, information-based tactics and framed as encouraging rather than restricting or dictating healthy food/beverage choices could enhance Missouri municipal leaders' receptivity to broader, higher impact approaches.

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